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As millions of Americans prepared to embark on Memorial Day road trips, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk on Friday said Congress must step in to reduce surging gas prices.

Continuing tax credits for hybrid cars, increasing the availability of ethanol-based fuel and ending local fuel monopolies were among the six steps Kirk, a Highland Park Republican, called for during a news conference at a Northbrook gas station.

Expanding the number of gasoline refineries, increasing American fuel economy and supporting the advancement of other alternative fuels and vehicles were the other components of Kirk's plan.

With gas prices in Chicago the highest in the nation, Kirk said dealing with rising fuel costs will be a "high priority" for Congress.

"Americans are motorists, and this is a critical issue," he said.

Kirk was joined in Northbrook by representatives from the U.S. Energy Department's Argonne National Laboratory, which has developed an experimental hybrid car with a larger battery capacity than traditional hybrid cars.

That means it can use electricity more than other hybrids — and use less gas. As a result, the vehicle can get more than 100 miles per gallon of gas, far greater than the national average of 26 miles per gallon, Kirk explained.

"It's that kind of future that we should all embrace," he said. "We need to keep moving forward."

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